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THE

Moral Status of Children

AND

*THEIR RELATION TO CHRIST AND
HIS CHURCH.*

BY REV. A. SUTHERLAND.

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PREFATORY NOTE.

THE substance of the following paper was delivered in the form of an address before the London, Toronto and Montreal Annual Conferences of 1875. Many members of the London Conference expressed a strong desire that the address might be printed for general circulation; the Toronto and Montreal Conferences expressed the same desire by formal resolution. The following is the resolution of the Montreal Conference, as printed in the published minutes :—

“*Resolved*—That this Conference, believing that the very clear and practical address of the Rev. A. Sutherland, on the ‘*Relation of Children to the Church*,’ delivered last evening at the anniversary of our Sunday School Society, is well adapted to supply a felt want in our Church, earnestly request its publication in tract form, for general distribution.”

A pressure of official duties hindered the completion of the MS. till the spring of the present year, 1876, and this must be my apology for its late appearance in print. It is now sent out with the hope that it may prove useful in stimulating thought in regard to a most important and much neglected subject.

At first I purposed enlarging the address somewhat; but, upon second thoughts, decided to confine it, for the present, to as brief a statement and discussion as the importance of the

subject would allow. This will account for the somewhat incomplete character of the paper—some points being barely touched and others only partially developed. My object is not to exhaust the theme, but rather to suggest trains of thought, and provoke examination.

I am not vain enough to suppose that what I have written will satisfy everybody ; but if it leads to a more thorough consideration of the subject, and consequently to a clearer apprehension of the truth, the end I seek will be gained.

THE AUTHOR.

TORONTO, June 1st, 1876.



THE MORAL STATUS OF CHILDREN

AND

THEIR RELATION TO CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH.

THE last decade has witnessed a remarkable growth of interest, throughout the Christian world, in the religious welfare of the young. That they constitute, in an important sense, the hope of the Church, and have a strong claim upon her sympathy and help, is now universally admitted ; and coupled with this, there is a growing conviction that their true relation to Christ and to his Church has not hitherto been fully appreciated or understood. This growth of interest is obvious in at least two directions : 1, In the efforts put forth to impart religious instruction to the very *youngest* children ; and 2, The character of the instruction given. The establishment in our Sunday schools of infant classes—an institution of comparatively recent date—is sufficient proof of a change of view in regard to the age at which a child may be claimed for Christ ; while the character of the teaching (dwelling less than formerly upon original sin and total depravity, and more upon the love of

God in Christ and the universality of the atonement) indicates just as plainly a change of view in regard to the moral status of children, and their relation to Christ as they enter the world.

This change of view is further indicated by a changed phraseology. Formerly the Church was wont to express in a vague way her sense of obligation in regard to the children, her duty to teach them, when old enough to understand, the truths of God's Word, and then "leave the results with Him;" but now the motto upon every Sunday school banner reads, "*ALL the children for Jesus.*" This fact is significant; for just as "the wisdom of this world" is sometimes condensed into terse, pithy proverbs, so the faith of the Church often finds expression in some brief and pointed "saying," which, in a single sentence, embodies a broad and weighty truth. If, then, the thought of the Church in regard to the children finds expression in the words quoted above, does it not imply that, back of the purpose to claim all the children for Christ, there is a conviction that they rightfully belong to Him, and that not merely by virtue of creation, but of redemption? The importance of this view will appear further on.

But notwithstanding this growth of interest in the religious training of the young, there is still much confusion of thought in regard to that which underlies the training, viz., the moral status of children and their

relation to Christ and his Church. It is of primary importance that this vagueness should, if possible, be supplanted by a clear apprehension of the truth, since this is a matter wherein unscriptural views may lead to a kind of teaching and training by which many of "these little ones" shall be made to offend.

For many years the writer felt dissatisfied with the utterances of various theological "standards" upon this subject. In fact, some of the authors seemed inclined to shirk the question altogether, while others spoke in so indefinite a manner as to leave one in doubt whether upon this topic, they had any clearly ascertained belief at all. Finally, he resolved to boldly face the problem, and, if possible, obtain a solution that would satisfy his own mind. He was prompted to this course by a conviction that it was very unlikely a subject of such vast importance would be left unsettled in the Scripture. He turned, therefore, to the Word of God, and was led, step by step, to the conclusions presented in the following pages. The investigation was pursued without stopping to inquire whether the conclusions reached harmonised with what others had written upon the subject; indeed, it is only just to state that, with the exception of the first two chapters in Dr. Hibbard's "Religion of Childhood," the writer has read nothing on the question outside of the theological standards before referred to. He now submits his

views, not with a desire of propounding a new theory, but with the hope that he may succeed in calling the attention of the Church to this vitally important topic, and thus promote a clearer apprehension of Scripture teaching in regard to the same.

Let us now see how the question stands.

There are three leading views in regard to the moral status of little children, one of which we may adopt, viz., 1, *Special Election* ; 2, *Baptismal Regeneration* ; 3, *Universal Redemption*.

Those who adopt the first view hold that all children, as descendants of Adam, are fallen, and under the curse ; that God of his sovereign will and pleasure has elected a certain number of these to eternal life, which life is infallibly secured to them antecedent to, and independent of any moral change whatever. Many further extend this view so as to embrace the notion—it is nothing more—that all who die in infancy belong to the elect number.

Those who adopt the second view hold that children, as such, are corrupt by nature, but that in and through the ordinance of baptism they are regenerated—born into the kingdom of God—being made thereby partakers of the divine life and nature. It is but just to say that many who believe in baptismal regeneration do not regard the ordinance, *in itself*, as possessed of saving virtue ; but they hold that the Divine

Spirit, who is the efficacious agent in regeneration, always works concurrently with the administration of the ordinance, and that by the Spirit and the water conjointly the child is born into the kingdom of God.

Those who adopt the third view hold that while children, as such, are fallen by nature, they are all redeemed by Christ; that the benefits of this redemption are co-extensive with the results of the fall—the blessing co-extensive with the curse; that through the atonement the guilt of original sin is so put away that no one is damned on account of it; that, therefore, every child born into this world is to be regarded, not only as fallen in Adam, but as redeemed by Christ—a partaker of “the free gift” which “came upon all men unto justification of life.” The conclusion is that children, as such, in virtue of the atonement, belong to Christ, and are heirs of the kingdom of heaven; and that this privilege and relationship can be forfeited only by their own wilful rejection of Christ, his salvation, and his service. Objections to this view will be considered in the proper place.

The question now is, Which of these views is in harmony with the teaching of God’s Word, and with the facts of human experience?

In regard to the first view—that of special election,—it may be said that it is based upon a particular theory of redemption rather than upon any express

statement of the Word of God. Nevertheless, it obtained widely in the Christian Church at a comparatively early date. From the period of the great controversy between Augustine and Pelagius, early in the fifth century, when the question of the moral condition of infants passed under review, the belief that infants not baptised and not elected would inevitably be lost, became a dogma throughout a large portion of the Christian world. Whatever difference of opinion there might be in regard to minor points, all were agreed on this, that infants were liable to eternal wrath on account of Adam's sin, and that "baptism, or the decree of election, or perhaps both, was necessary to annul the death penalty, or wash away original sin."

At the period to which we refer, the dogma of special election was closely associated with that of baptismal regeneration; and it need not surprise us to find that, in an age of controversy, it was often asserted in its broadest and most naked form. Not a few seemed to experience a kind of savage pleasure in pressing the dogma to its most repulsive consequences, and were ready to assert with Fulgentius, a bishop of the fifth century, concerning unbaptised children, that, "whether they die in their mother's womb, or after they are born, one must hold for certain and undoubted that they are to be tormented with the everlasting punishment of eternal fire, . . .

to suffer the endless torments of hell, where the devil and his angels are to burn for evermore." Augustine (that greatly over-rated man) asserted substantially the same doctrine.

Without pausing to discuss the theory of special election in detail, it may suffice at present to notice its practical effects in regard to child-nurture. Such a theological tenet must, it seems to us, stand directly in the way of all *believing* effort to train a child "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Holding such a dogma, there can be at best only a faint hope that the child *may* be one of the elect; but opposed to this there is the paralysing doubt that he *may* be a reprobate—a child of the devil—upon whom Christian nurture is wasted, and upon whom no covenant blessing can be believably invoked. It may be said it is a Christian parent's duty to train his children in the knowledge of divine truth, and in the performance of religious duties, without any reference to the question whether they are elect or not; but I wish merely to point out that it is simply impossible to discharge this duty *in faith*, so long as there exists in the parent's mind an uncertainty—a standing doubt—whether his children have been redeemed or not. It seems to us, the prayer of such an one would not go much beyond that of a certain sceptic, who is said to have prayed,

"O God (*if* there be a God), save my soul (*if* I have a soul)." That terrible IF renders faith impossible.

It may be said that these observations are not in harmony with the facts—that many who hold special election, nevertheless pray in faith for their children, and strive most earnestly to train them up for God. Doubtless this is true ; but it only proves that in some cases—perhaps many—those who hold special election as a dogma, practically reject it when it touches the all-important question of their own or their children's salvation ; for we see that they pray for and teach their children *as if* they believed that the fact of their redemption was beyond dispute. In such cases the instinct of the renewed heart outruns the logic of the creed.

Again, it is manifest that special election is a theory which stands directly opposed to plain statements of the Word of God. It conflicts with the announcement that "God so loved THE WORLD that he gave his only begotten Son, that WHOSOEVER believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life ;" it conflicts with the assurance that Jesus Christ "by the grace of God should taste death for EVERY man," and that, "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the WHOLE WORLD ;" it comes into direct collision with that impregnable bulwark built around the doctrine of

universal atonement in Rom. v. 12-19; and not less strongly does it conflict with the Saviour's loving assurance concerning "these little ones," that "of such is the kingdom of heaven."

Moreover, the dogma is one which, when fully stated, conflicts with the very instincts of humanity and with every reasonable and scriptural view of divine justice and mercy. This was keenly felt even in Augustine's day, and hence some, recoiling from the repulsive statement of the dogma so common at that time, first began to imagine, and then to teach, that there was a middle place—an *infernus puerorum*, or hell of infants—where they would be subjected to a much milder form of punishment or suffering than would be inflicted upon adult sinners. This, however, was only an ingenious way of cutting—not untying—the Gordian knot. A theory so entirely unscriptural was not likely to find general acceptance; but certain in the Church were not slow to act upon the hint that had been given, and so in after years, hard by the "infants' hell" of Augustinianism, was located the purgatory of papal Rome.

It is not necessary that we should further discuss the point, inasmuch as in these days the notion that infants, under any circumstances, are lost, has been very generally abandoned. We have touched upon it only in order to "show cause" why we cannot accept

the theory of special election as solving the problem of the moral status of infants.

Let us now look at the second view, that of baptismal regeneration. On this point it is not necessary that much should be said ; yet I cannot altogether pass it over, because I believe that the error, though in a modified form, prevails more widely than most people are aware of. There are some, we know, who boldly avow their belief in the doctrine that baptism washes away the guilt of both original and actual sin, and that it invariably marks the date of the new birth; in other words, that the human soul is regenerated in baptism, and in baptism only—that the Divine Spirit works as a regenerating power only in connection with that ordinance ; but there is another—we fear large—class who would utterly repudiate the doctrine, as above stated, who are, nevertheless, largely influenced by it. This appears in the anxiety manifested by such persons to secure baptism for their children in cases of dangerous illness or in prospect of death. They have no idea, they say, that baptism is necessary to save the child ; but yet it is evident they are influenced by a vague idea that, *in some way*, the child will suffer serious loss if it dies without baptism. They are not prepared to avow belief in the saving efficacy of the ordinance ; but lest there might be something in it, they prefer to keep on the safe side, sometimes

remarking, "Well, it won't do the child any harm, anyway."

Such vagueness of thought on so important a question cannot be justified. We ought to be ready to give a better reason than this for the baptism of our little ones ; and it may aid us in getting a clear apprehension of the truth if we endeavour to answer this question, "*Why do we administer baptism at all?*" Some will say, "Because Christ enjoined it." Yes, but apart from the mere letter of the command, on what ground do we administer the ordinance ? Take, for example, the case of an adult, who, professing to repent of his sins and believe in Christ, desires Christian baptism : do we baptise him in order to *make* him a Christian, or because we believe he *is* a Christian ? The latter, undoubtedly. Well, why do we baptise an infant ? Is it in order to make it a child of God, or *because we believe it belongs to Him already*, having been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ ? Again we say, the latter, undoubtedly. In other words, by baptism we do not create a fact, we only recognise, by an expressive symbol, what we believe to be already true. There is this difference, however, between the two cases supposed : In the case of an adult it is only the judgment of charity, because we cannot be absolutely sure that he is a child of the kingdom ; but in the case of "these little ones" there

is no room for doubt, Christ having emphatically declared, "Of such *is* the kingdom of heaven."

This dogma of baptismal regeneration is a most dangerous error. It is the modern form of the old Judaising spirit, "Except ye be circumcised, and keep the law of Moses, ye cannot be saved." It attributes a magical or saving virtue to the ordinance, and shifts the ground of our salvation from the atonement of Christ to a mere ceremony. Nor does it mend the matter to say that the saving virtue is not in the ordinance itself, but that the Holy Spirit works only in connection with baptism, for this is presumptuously to "limit the Holy One of Israel," by making his saving work to depend upon the convenience—or still worse, the caprice—of a fallible human being; while it would leave the helpless little one, who, by no fault of its own, had been debarred from the rite of baptism, to perish without hope. Moreover, let it once be conceded that water baptism is essential to salvation, and (for this view will accompany the other) that to be valid it must be administered by an ordained "priest," and you put into the hands of such a priesthood an engine of spiritual despotism that will crush the religious freedom of the world. Besides all this, the dogma is without any scriptural foundation, and is one which utterly contradicts the facts of human experience. There are thousands of baptised persons

whose conduct affords painful evidence that they are not regenerated ; while, on the other hand, not a few are to be met with who bring forth the manifest fruits of the Spirit before receiving the ordinance of baptism.

Let no one infer from what has just been said that we undervalue this important ordinance of Christianity. We regard it the imperative duty of Christian parents to dedicate their children to God in baptism ; but we desire to keep this ordinance just where we believe Christ put it—at the threshold of the *visible* Church. Hence we regard it not as a magical ceremonial, working a mysterious change in the child's inner nature, but a beautiful and expressive symbol of the Holy Spirit's work, and the seal which outwardly attests the child's covenant relation to God.

What, then, as regards little children, is the significance of Christian baptism ? It is not retrospective (washing away original sin), nor immediately efficacious (regenerating the inner nature), but it is a present dedication, with reference to the future training of one who is in covenant with God. We regard the rite, therefore, as being : 1, *Declaratory*—a declaration of our belief that our children have been redeemed by Christ, and belong to Him. 2, *Symbolical*—(1), Of the Spirit's work—the purification of our moral nature ; (2), Of separation from the world and sin. 3, *Initiatory*—The rite by which the child is introduced into the

visible Church, and its covenant relation recognised by the Church. 4, As a *seal* of God's covenant of grace with mankind.

Holding the views above indicated, we cannot accept the dogma of baptismal regeneration as a solution of the problem of the moral status of children.

Let us now take a survey of the third view—that of *universal redemption*.

Adopting this view, we hold that all men are fallen in Adam, but redeemed by Christ; that the "free gift" has, through the atonement, come upon all, and therefore that every child born into the world is to be regarded as redeemed to God—an heir of the kingdom of heaven. Our children, born in sin because of their descent from the first Adam, are heirs of grace in virtue of their covenant relation to the second. The benefits of redemption are real. Being subjects of Christ's redeeming work, our children must also be subjects of the Holy Spirit's influences, for a redemption that brought no spiritual help would be no redemption at all. We hold, therefore, that to every child is imparted a principle of spiritual life—not in the sense of "regeneration," as technically understood; but rather in the sense of a good implanted—not inherited—which it is the province of Christian nurture, under the Divine Spirit's guidance and help, to develop and strengthen. In a word, through the atonement the

suspended *contact* of the Divine Spirit with the human soul is restored, and this begins with the first dawns of that soul's existence. Hence in the Christian nurture of children these two facts are to be kept steadily in view—the fall and the redemption; the depravity inherited, the new life imparted. If we lose sight of the first, we shall be baffled in our efforts and disappointed in results, while our utter need of the Spirit's help will be but faintly realised; if we lose sight of the second, we will be feeble in hope and faith, and indirect in aim; but if both the facts be kept steadily in view, we will toil on, in full assurance of hope that our "labour" will not be "in vain in the Lord."

That this view is scriptural can easily be shown. The universal redemption of the race is asserted in the Word of God with a frequency and plainness that leaves no room for doubt. Not only does that Word represent the provision of divine grace as all-sufficient for the needs of the race, but it represents the former as superabounding: "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." And just as certainly, "as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation, even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life." The "ALLS," and "EVERYS," and "WHOSOEVERS" of Scripture are decisive upon this point.

And then as regards the covenant relation of children to the kingdom, that surely was settled by the Saviour's repeated declaration, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven."

Perhaps, at this point, some thoughtful reader demurs, and doubts whether, after all, it is strictly true that children, as such, belong to Christ and are heirs of the kingdom. Well, if they belong not to Christ, to *whom* do they belong? Are you willing to accept the alternative? I am aware that not a few do theoretically accept it; that is, they have a vague notion that for some reason children in general must of necessity belong to the devil, for some years at least, and that afterwards they may be "converted," and so escape from his hands. But is the notion right? Is it true? Is it taught in the Word of God? Can you find any Christian man who is willing squarely to face the conclusion and accept it in regard to his own child? I trow not. The deep, underlying conviction of every Christian parent is, "My child has been redeemed by Christ, and belongs to Him ;—

' He justly claims it for his own,
Who bought it with a price ;'

and if it now belongs to Him, *there is no reason why it should ever own another master.*"

If the foregoing considerations are deemed insufficient, let us look at the question from another side.

You believe that all who die in infancy are infallibly saved? Yes. Well, *how* are they saved? Not by a conscious faith—they are incapable of that; not by a process of “conversion” as technically understood—they are equally incapable of that. Does death effect a moral change? No. Is there any change after death? No. How, then, are they saved? There is, there can be but one answer,—*They are saved because Christ hath redeemed them.* By his atonement He has entirely put away the guilt of *original* sin, and they have nothing to do as yet with any other. Here we have the only rational and scriptural ground on which we can confidently believe in the salvation of those who die in infancy. Nor is this all. Universal redemption not only assures us of the salvation of all our little children if they die—it also shows what their relation to Christ and his kingdom is while they live. Standing upon this immovable foundation, we can confidently challenge the world and say: “*Can any man forbid water that these should not be baptised WHO HAVE RECEIVED THE HOLY GHOST AS WELL AS WE?*”

But now the reader may ask, What about conversion? Do you believe in the necessity of the new birth? Assuredly I do. But allow me to ask, just here, What do you mean by conversion, or the new birth? You say, I mean a change of heart, a change of nature. Very well; but *what kind* of a change are

you thinking of? Do you mean a chemical change of a material substance? or do you mean a moral change in the affections of a human soul and its relation to God? You say, I mean the latter. Well, do not be startled if I now ask, Wherein does a child's relation to Christ and his kingdom need changing? If Christ's declaration, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven," is decisive, and if it be true that adults must become "as little children" in order to enter the kingdom, what "change" would you propose whereby a child's relation to the kingdom will be made better than Christ made it?

Let us suppose a case: Here are two persons, the one a guileless child who has known naught of evil, the other a hoary-headed sinner, who has spent long years in all manner of wickedness. In the nature of things, can "conversion" mean the same thing to these two persons? Can it be the same thing to the child that it is to the aged sinner? Surely it cannot. The one is a responsible, the other an irresponsible being; the child stands in covenant relation to God, cleared from the penalty of original sin, and, as yet, free from actual transgression; the other stands as a condemned rebel—one who has wilfully turned his back on Christ, and run greedily in the ways of sin. And as these two persons occupy entirely different ground in regard to their relationship to God, so the

necessity of "conversion," in precisely the same technical sense, cannot be affirmed of each.

But, it is again objected, did not Christ teach the universal necessity of the new birth when He said to Nicodemus, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God?" In a certain sense He did, but it may fairly be questioned whether the words have any reference to little children at all, or were intended to include them. The new birth of which the Saviour speaks is a change which brings a sinner into the kingdom of God, and therefore his words fairly apply to all who are not in that kingdom; but we must bear in mind that the same Jesus who said "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God," also said, concerning "these little ones," "Of such is the kingdom," and that there might be no mistake in regard to the different positions of the two classes, He said to his disciples, "Except ye"—ye men—"be converted, AND BECOME AS LITTLE CHILDREN, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."

"But is not every child by nature fallen and depraved?" Undoubtedly (though I fear we often attach a meaning to such words as "fallen" and "depraved" which the Bible does not); but why will you persist in looking at the fact of the fall entirely apart from the fact of redemption? and why do you practically ignore the glorious truth that, by the atonement of

Christ Jesus, every child of Adam is placed in a position, as regards the kingdom of God, entirely different from that in which it was left by the fall?

If the foregoing views are correct, how comes it, some one may ask, that children invariably grow up wicked, and if saved at all, have to be converted in the old way?

In the first place, I don't know that they do *invariably* grow up wicked. There are some of whom we do not hesitate to affirm that they are filled with the Holy Ghost from their very birth. But waiving this consideration for the present, there are various reasons why they often grow up in the way indicated.

One reason is, *they are seldom taught to expect anything else*. In not a few families the little ones are unreasonably chidden and repressed. The ignorances and indiscretions of childhood—the mere overflowings of an exuberant vitality—are magnified into grievous moral offences, and a burden is laid upon the child's conscience that ought not to be there. From their earliest years they hear about their depravity and wickedness—about the fall and its terrible consequences; but are seldom told, what is equally true, that they belong to Christ, having been redeemed from the fall by his precious blood. The result is, they grow up with the idea that from the very first they are out of the fold, estranged from God, the children of the devil, deserv-

ing eternal wrath. What they need to be taught is, that all this would be sadly, terribly true, *were it not for the atonement of Christ*; but that through that atonement they who were "far off" have been brought "nigh," and their relation to the kingdom entirely changed. Only let the heart of every little child, from its earliest years, be filled with the thought that it belongs to Christ, that He died for it, that the design of his death was to keep it from evil all through the years, and fit it by true holiness for the life above, and then we shall have fewer complaints that children always and inevitably go astray.

Another reason why so many children, even among those belonging to Christian families, grow up careless and wicked, is because weakness of faith in regard to their covenant relation, results in weakness of effort and indirectness of aim in their religious training. So long as there is a standing doubt whether our children, as such, belong to Christ, it is impossible to labour *in faith* for their spiritual nurture. Under such circumstances prayer is merely asking for something that *may* be granted, and teaching a random scattering of seed that *may* possibly produce a harvest; whereas, if we rightly apprehend the relation of the little ones to Christ, prayer becomes a confident asking for covenanted blessings, and teaching a believing effort to plant living seed in a soil where a Divine Spirit waits

to water it, and cause it to spring up with abundant increase.

Still another reason is, the work of religious training is deferred too long. "While men slept, an enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat," and we cannot tell at how early a period this deadly sowing begins. Let us see to it, then, that we are first in the field, filling the heart with the good seed of the kingdom, before the enemy with his tares has pre-occupied all the soil.

But the strongest reason of all is to be found, perhaps, in the fact that, as a rule, we altogether understate the strength of opposing forces. Let us not overstate the truth. While we hold that every child has been redeemed by Christ, and is, in virtue of that redemption, an heir of the kingdom, yet their natures are not angelic. In the heart of every child of Adam there is a natural proneness to evil. The tares will grow among the wheat in the heart of a child, as well as in the broader field of the world, and it is the two-fold design of Christian nurture to repress the growth of the one and encourage the growth of the other.

Still further, we must remember that when a child reaches what we are wont to call the age of accountability, his relation to the kingdom necessarily undergoes a change. He is no longer an unconscious and irresponsible being; he is now responsible and ac-

countable. He has reached the point where the mighty powers of Choice and Will come into play in determining his moral destiny. He must now for himself make choice of Christ and holiness on the one hand, or of the world and sin on the other. Besides this, as he leaves the sheltered harbour of infancy and drifts out into the great ocean of life, he is at once surrounded by influences which tend to separate him from the kingdom of God. The pleasures of sense appeal to him on every side ; fleshly passions clamour for indulgence ; the enjoyments of this world are present and tangible, while those of the next seem intangible and far away. Thus the bent of a nature within, and the force of influences and example without, all tend in one direction and unless these are met by the counter operations of divine grace, and of vigilant watchfulness and Christian nurture, they will surely carry the day, and the hapless soul will drift farther and farther from God, until between it and the kingdom of heaven there is "a great gulf fixed," over which it shall never be able to pass.

We are now prepared for a most important question : *Wherein does the moral state of a little child differ from that of an adult believer ?* In several respects :

- 1, The child is in a state of *unconscious* safety : The adult believer is in a state of *conscious salvation*.
- 2, The child is treated as an unconscious and irre-

sponsible being: The adult as a conscious and responsible agent.

3, The child has reached his position of unconscious safety (an unconditional benefit of the atonement), without choice or effort on his own part: The adult has reached his position of conscious salvation (a conditional benefit of the atonement), by the exercise of an intelligent faith in Christ crucified.

Hence—

4, The unconscious safety of the child is God's provision to meet the necessities of an irresponsible being: The conscious salvation of the adult believer, and the way in which it is realised, is God's method of dealing with those who are intelligent and accountable.

If these things be so, *what, as regards a child, does "conversion" mean?* Does it mean anything? Yes, it means a great deal. It means that there comes a point of time when the state of unconscious safety *passes over* into one of conscious salvation; when the child, for himself, makes choice of Christ and his service; when he exercises an intelligent faith in that atonement which all along has been his safety; and when the Divine Spirit works a new and more definite work in that heart wherein He has already dwelt. That period of choice, and of conscious spiritual enlightenment, marks the period of "conversion," as technically understood. And here again it is evident

that while in both cases a real change is implied, yet in the attendant circumstances there must be some difference between the experience of a child and that of an adult. Conversion is commonly supposed to imply previous conviction and repentance ; but these exercises will differ widely in the two cases supposed. In the case of a child who has been religiously trained there can be no deep conviction of personal wrongdoing, because he has, as yet, but little "conscience of sins;" neither can there be deep sorrow for the past, for he has no "past" over which to grieve; but there may be a deep conviction of the sinfulness of his nature, and the absolute need of the Spirit's renewing work to fit him for God's service here, and for the glory of his presence hereafter. In the case of an adult who is brought to Christ, there will be not only the conviction of a sinful nature, but superadded to this a deeper and more painful conviction of a sinful life. In other words, the conviction of a child who has just reached years of accountability, will have especial reference to *what he is*; that of an adult will have especial reference to *what he has done*.

The view presented in this paper in regard to the relation of little children to Christ, sheds clear light upon a passage in regard to the interpretation of which there has been much diversity of opinion: "And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath; but

bring them up [train, educate] *in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.*" Now, if children, as such, belong not to Christ to begin with, it is impossible thus to train them with any hope of good results. Plant in your garden a root of the deadly nightshade ; care for it, water it, enrich the soil wherein it grows, bestow upon it the most careful culture ; but no amount of effort will make it produce wholesome fruit. To the end of time it will remain a poisonous and deadly thing, showing that labour bestowed upon a weed or poisonous plant is but labour wasted. And if our children be not plants of the Lord's right hand planting—if they are only weeds or poisonous plants springing up from the world's arid wastes—then the command to "*bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*" is a mockery, or worse. Such training will result in nothing, unless, first of all, the little ones belong to Christ.

What is the conclusion of the whole matter ? "*Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones ;* for I say unto you that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven." Oh ! if these things be so ; if our children have been redeemed—if they belong to Christ—if He has given them one by one into our charge, with the injunction, "Nurse this child for me, and I will give thee thy wages,"—if around "these little ones" angels watch and hover—if

mighty forces within and without oppose our efforts to train them up for Christ—surely the importance of faithful, loving, Christian nurture can hardly be overstated. “In the *morning* sow thy seed.” If longer deferred, some will fall “by the wayside,” and the “fowls of the air” will devour it; some will fall “upon a rock,” where swift growth will be followed by swifter decay; some may fall “among thorns,” and these, springing up, may choke it; but if in life’s earliest hours the good seed is faithfully sown, fear not but it will find “good ground,” from which it will spring up with a hundredfold increase. Remember! “While men slept, the enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat.” While we sleep, the seeds of worldliness, and selfishness and pride are being sown broadcast; while we sleep, the seeds of sceptical error are being dropped from book or paper into the opening furrows of the mind—seeds from which the hapless child will reap a harvest of unavailing sorrow through all the coming years. O ye Christian parents and teachers! up and be doing, before the enemy fill with rank weeds and tares the field that God has given you to till.

I cannot leave this subject without a thought touching the little ones that are no longer with us. Some of our children are gone. Gone where? Thank God, there need be no uncertainty about that. They are gone where there is “no more death, neither sorrow,

nor crying ;" they are gone where "the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters, and " where " God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." The lambs are safe ; they have only been " lifted higher ;" and now in the heavenly fold of the Good Shepherd, they enjoy the fulness of blessing foreshadowed in the Shepherd's words, " Suffer the little children to come unto me."

Perhaps among the readers now glancing over these lines, there may be some sorrowful Rachel, refusing to be comforted because her children are not. Let me speak to thee, not in the language of sorrowful condolence, but in words of exulting congratulation. " Hail ! thou that art highly favoured among women : " the Lord hath put high honour upon thee. He hath called thy little one to dwell in the palace of the king ; and now, walking in the light of the Saviour's countenance, or folded in his loving arms, it rests and awaits thy coming. Walk thou softly before God. There are more eyes upon thee than thou knowest. All heaven has a deeper interest in thee than ever before. Surely the very angels of glory, speeding upon their missions of mercy, pause to smile upon thee as they pass, while they whisper lovingly to each other, "*She's the mother of an angel whom we know.*"

